

VUB RESOURCE POLICY: ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Starting higher studies heralds a new chapter in the lives of many young people. As students, they enter a new environment, a new group of friends and/or student associations. Students living on their own or in student digs experience a new kind of freedom that is also accompanied by more (study) pressure, new professional and personal responsibilities, etc. In this new phase of life, young people tend to experiment more with all kinds of substances, including alcohol and drugs. Substance use does not necessarily lead to dependence. Yet even 'occasional' use can pose serious health risks; high-risk substance use is not as harmless as some may think. Young adults are vulnerable users; they are at high risk because of the effects of these substances on the brain. Regular or excessive alcohol and/or drug use has negative consequences for the student on a physical level, but also on a psychosocial level, the use of these substances often disrupts functioning. Adverse consequences such as driving under the influence, missing classes and memory loss are frequent. Risky substance use is also often accompanied by transgressive behaviour. Young adulthood is a crucial period for yet another reason: there is a real chance that unhealthy habits that students develop in their student days will continue throughout their adult lives, impacting their later personal and professional lives. Such an impact could be that students develop a dependency (addiction) to substances; that risk is real. All these elements demonstrate the need for higher education institutions to focus on prevention and early detection of risky substance use.

The need for a resources policy is not just there for theoretical arguments. In 2022, after the biggest COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted, students at the VUB signalled their concerns about substance use among students. Students themselves observed a shift pre- and post-COVID. Substance use would have evolved from covert to more visible, to more risky and more addictive substances, and become more normalised among students. Students themselves expressed the need for support at the VUB. But we found that within the VUB we could not fall back on a policy framework for preventing and dealing with problems with alcohol, drugs and other substances. This policy plan should meet that need.

This plan is co-creative. In 2022, we set up a working group with the following stakeholders: student affairs, study counselling, facility services, the kotcoach, student work, campus facilities, BSGgtgv, BSG AS vzw and BOJ Raad vzw. A psychiatrist from the UZ Brussel, specialising in addiction problems, participated once. Two staff from CGG Brussels-Houba coached the working group in developing a substance policy tailored to the VUB and its student community. In addition, a collaboration - a two-year breakthrough project - was initiated with the organisation Tweeperenboom. To bring about a real culture change, Tweeperenboom supports the VUB in creating an innovative mindset around safe partying and developing awareness initiatives around substance use.

The working group decided to include the following substances in the VUB policy: alcohol, cannabis, other illicit drugs and psychoactive medication.

2. SUBSTANCE USE IN A STUDENT POPULATION: AN ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Alcohol and possibly other substances are not immediately new to most students. We see that psychoactive substances such as drugs and alcohol are popular among students. But in a context where students face new challenges - a new learning and living environment, a

different way of studying and working, more independence and freedom - it is not always obvious to handle such resources responsibly.

ALCOHOL

Drinking alcohol has become normalised and (almost) inseparable from society. Cocktails at brunch, a glass of wine with lunch, an aperitif ... Weekly or daily routine for many. Alcohol is also still the most consumed substance among the student population.

However, there are many risks associated with alcohol. To determine whether or not someone has a problem with alcohol consumption or has a risky drinking pattern, the number of glasses drunk per day or per week is often used as a benchmark. According to the guideline of the (VAD) and the High Health Council, it is best not to drink more than 10 standard glasses per week.

In the VAD's 'In Higher Spheres' report, we read that 92.5% of students say they have drunk alcohol at one time or another. On average, students drink less than 10 glasses per week, which falls under the guideline for 'acceptable consumption' from the VAD and the High Health Council. So most of them handle this responsibly. However, 52% of male students in higher education drink more than 10 glasses of alcohol per week. Among female students, 25% drink more than ten glasses of alcohol per week. From the VAD figures, we learn that during teaching periods, the frequency of alcohol use is higher than during examination or block periods. The proportion of regular users of beer, wine, aperitifs and spirits (drinking once a week to daily) is about four to five times higher during class periods than during block or exam periods.

Three quarters of students do not consider alcohol essential to having a successful evening. On the positive side, the vast majority of students say they drink for social and *enhancement* motives. 'Because it's fun' or 'because it improves the atmosphere at parties' are cited much more as reasons than negative drinking motives, such as coping, including 'drinking helps me forget my worries'.

Yet risky drinking is no exception. Consider risky drinking patterns such as binge drinking - very high consumption of alcohol on one occasion - (25%), drinking in before going out (19%) and playing drinking games (29%). These phenomena increase the student's score on the AUDIT- C (a screening tool to identify individuals with risky and harmful patterns of alcohol consumption). Such drinking patterns also imply a higher risk of alcohol-related problems. Looking at students' frequency of use, over a third of students (35.2%) who drank alcohol in the past year have an increased risk of problem use. That is use that compromises either the student's health or safety, or the well-being and safety of others.

CANNABIS

Cannabis is still the most commonly used 'drug' according to the latest student survey by the VAD. 44.4% of those surveyed have used this drug at some point, on an occasional basis, mainly during class periods. 1 in 4 students used cannabis in the past year, rather on an occasional basis, according to the VAD.

In 2021, 29.5% of higher education students who used cannabis in the last year were experiencing one or more manifestations of problematic use. Measured according to the DSM-IV criteria for cannabis dependence, for example, these students were using for longer than anticipated, wanted to quit cannabis for more than a week - unsuccessfully, were able to use cannabis due to their

cannabis use do not fulfil their study commitments, and so on. The more frequent the cannabis use, the greater the likelihood of multiple problems.

OTHER ILLICIT DRUGS

The list of illicit drugs includes cocaine, GHB, heroin, ketamine, LSD and other trip aids, speed, nitrous oxide, XTC and new psychoactive substances ('designer drugs' or 'smart drugs' such as mephedrone). The use of other illicit drugs is much lower than that of cannabis. Nevertheless, last-year use of these substances also increased slightly (13% according to the Flemish Wellbeing Monitor and 11% according to the VAD measurement). In this, XTC and cocaine are the most commonly used substances, with 8% and 5% last-year use, respectively. Generally, these drugs are started at a later age, 18, an age when young people can generally start higher studies.

PSYCHOACTIVE MEDICATION: SEDATIVE MEDICATION, STIMULANT MEDICATION & OPIOIDS

About one in nine students (11.5%) report ever having taken stimulant medication. The impact of the corona crisis on users of sedative or stimulant medication is striking. The percentage of students did not increase much but the proportion who used these medications weekly or more often did. 7% of students reported using this medication to improve study performance with a notable side note: the majority indicated that this medication does not help at all. Then again, during block and exam periods, the use of sleep and sedation medication, especially benzodiazepines and Z products, was higher. About 1 in 10 students reported using this weekly during this stressful period.

Figures around opioid use among students are lacking. Opioids have a euphoric effect in higher doses in addition to pain relief. They induce a kind of intoxication that makes it also used as a recreational drug. They are drugs with a strong addictive effect, which we include in the focus of this policy plan.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SUBSTANCE USE

The VAD's recent survey showed that the corona crisis had a clear impact on students' substance use. The pandemic, with all sorts of measures in place to counter it, obviously affected dormitory, student and nightlife. The results of the latest survey should be read in this light.

3. THE VUB RESOURCES POLICY: PART OF THE VUB POLICY "WE(L)ARE STUDENTS"

Promoting the well-being and health of our students is a priority for VUB. As a community of caring¹, we are strongly committed to prevention and want to promote and protect the well-being and health of our students. For those students for whom prevention is insufficient, we want to provide adequate and easily accessible care and counselling services.

Starting from the general ambitions of the VUB student welfare policy, this VUB resources policy sets four objectives :

- From the VUB we create clarity around what is or is not tolerated regarding substance use

¹ Everyone shares the responsibility to look after the welfare of students.

- We want to prevent problems resulting from substance use by making students aware of responsible use (from non-use to harm reduction) of substances;
- We want to create a safe and constructive context on our campuses that encourages healthy choices;
- We want to make the topic of substance use discussable among students. We want to encourage them to think about substance use in a nuanced way so that they can deal with substances in their environment in a thoughtful manner.

With these objectives, we respond to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the resources issue. We therefore focus in the present policy not only on the resources themselves, but also on the context and the individual. After all, 'being a student' and 'studying in higher education' are associated with specific characteristics that explain why exactly we choose this policy approach:

- Students do not always spend so much time within the VUB's classroom walls. Drug use predominantly takes place in other contexts such as nightlife, leisure activities (sports club, student union, . . .), ... Working out an overarching, general policy, consisting of rules and procedures, seems less efficient in this context. In this resource policy, we take a different tack. Instead, the working group defined three contexts of use where there is a need for clear boundaries, environmental interventions, concrete measures or strengthening of the accessible care and support offer. With the ambitions defined for each use context, we want to encourage our students to use resources responsibly and create a safe and constructive environment on campus that encourages healthy choices.
- Plurality also plays a role in this context. Students are given a large degree of autonomy. As a higher education institution, we do not want to interfere or intervene in this, including with regard to substance use. This age of majority implies that mature students are themselves responsible for what they do and for the choices they make. However, this can be an additional pressure for young adults to do things 'right'.
- Students experience many changes when they make the transition to higher education. They are confronted with changes in terms of social environment, a new living situation for those going to live in digs, stress as a result of the new educational environment and study pressure that comes with it, ... These transitions can be a reason for students to resort to alcohol or other psychoactive substances, specifically because of the so-called coping mechanism. After all, such substances often make establishing social contact a bit easier, or help forget worries for a while.
In addition, the biggest change for many students is the freedom after compulsory education. For many, student time feels like a world opening up, with no 'compulsory' class days and more time for free choices and filling in free time. Free time that they spend in student associations, student bars, ... where alcohol is often drunk more or other substances are available.
- Despite high substance use, support services of higher education institutions such as student psychologists only come into limited contact with students seeking support specifically because of problematic substance use. A survey among students showed that those with an alcohol or drug problem are more likely to contact their network (GP, psychologist, family, etc.). This is exacerbated by the fact that students themselves have to take the initiative to address this support offer, such as student psychologists; there is - as in compulsory education - no obligation for medical monitoring. As a result, many students with substance use problems slip through the cracks. For example, when

When student psychologists do detect problematic substance use, it is often a manifestation of other problems students are dealing with: stress, fear of failure, insomnia, depressive symptoms, ... Students are often unaware that their use can constitute a health problem. Indeed, health problems, e.g. psychosis or addiction, related to the use of alcohol, drugs or other substances usually only manifest later in life.

- Students also spend a lot of time off campus. They come into contact with students from other institutions, or those who are no longer studying, through entertainment districts, or external activities. This indicates how important it is to align one's own policies with those of another higher education institution, for example, or policies at the local level.

4. CLARIFY

Both numerical data from surveys and signals from our student community and VUB services (surveillance, housing, ...) indicate that cannabis and other illegal drugs are present on our campuses, more so than before. Students possess and use cannabis and other illegal substances on our campuses. Some incite fellow students to use these substances. Still other students or external persons deal illegal substances on our campuses.

Our campuses are private domain with a public character. Our students often think of the campuses as a mini-society within the city; a kind of free city where they feel safe. But the presence of cannabis and other illegal drugs - from use and possession to dealing - puts the physical and psychological safety for our integral VUB community very much at risk.

Today, however, the clear message that our university does NOT tolerate cannabis and other illegal drugs on its campuses and within its community is missing. There are explicit federal regulations on cannabis and other illegal drugs that should be sufficient on their own:

- For cannabis, the regulations indicate a low prosecution priority when the possessor is of age and the amount of cannabis in possession is for personal use only (max. 3 grams or one cultivated plant). However, this low prosecution rate does not apply to our university campuses and their immediate surroundings because, according to the law, certain aggravating circumstances apply: 1) our campuses are places accessible to the public and 2) are educational institutions.
- For all other illegal drugs, there is a total ban in Belgium for both minors and adults. Drug use by adults in the presence of minors is always strictly prosecuted in Belgium.

We must explicitly reiterate these legal provisions in a clear VUB message to the VUB community; otherwise, their absence may contribute to boundaries in terms of possession, (inciting) use and dealing of cannabis and illicit drugs being searched for and constantly pushed on our campuses.

For this reason, our priority is to create clarity about the place of cannabis and other illegal drugs on our campuses. The message will be short and clear: the VUB does not tolerate cannabis and other illegal drugs on its campuses. We will spread that message through various campaigns and channels. We focus on the broad VUB community, but also on specific contexts (student housing and nightlife).

5. PREVENTION: SENSITISING, INFORMING AND TEACHING SKILLS AROUND PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

5.1 SENSITISING AND INFORMING

The VUB strives to create an academic, social and residential environment that supports health-promoting standards. To best achieve this, social support is needed. A public support base in which the VUB community clearly recognises the health risks of substance use and seeks to mitigate these risks. Raising awareness and repeating the same message over and over again are essential for the intended behavioural change. After all, this is how we create more awareness and understanding of the consequences of (problematic) substance use.

Prevention is aimed at preventing irresponsible substance use. With preventive interventions, we want to inform students about the effects and risks of (problematic) substance use. Not only to prevent them from starting or continuing long-term substance use themselves. But also with the intention that they can notice risky behaviour in their fellow students, call them to account and take care of each other.

For an integrated preventive approach to risky substance use among students, it is important to include every context in which a student might come into contact with psychoactive substances. It is therefore recommended to focus preventive actions not only on classrooms, but also on other places where students frequent: student housing, nightlife, clubs, sports and culture facilities, the library and other study areas, etc. By opting for this context-oriented policy approach, combined with the use of various channels, we want to bring targeted information to the students themselves, reach as many students as possible and thus gain broad support for substance use prevention at various levels. But these preventive interventions will only be successful if we invest in collaboration with students. We need to engage individuals from the peer group in prevention initiatives so that they can help communicate the prevention message to others from the same target group. Indeed, one's own peer group is an important source of support and a place where norms and values develop. Young people talk more easily with their own peers, especially about topics that are socially taboo, such as the (risky) use of alcohol, drugs and other substances.

5.1.1. Raising awareness around risky substance use

We want to inform students, make them aware of risky substance use and point out the importance of responsible use. We focus on education and information by communicating about the VUB drugs policy and launching on- and offline awareness campaigns.

Not all use is problematic. But substance use does carry a wide variety of risks. Every 'drug' has a risk of abuse and addiction. Besides health risks, students can also get into financial or legal trouble because of their use, for example. It is not only the drug that determines the risks. Personal characteristics (age, gender, state of mind, etc.) and conditions of use (where, how much, why, etc.) also play a role.

Several factors determine what exactly constitutes 'responsible use'. We illustrate this for the case of drink-driving.

- If the law forbids venturing into traffic under the influence then the only form of responsible use 'do not use'.

- Culture and social norms are also influential. More and more people find drink-driving unacceptable, for example.
- Individual factors also make some individuals or groups more susceptible to the risks of substance use than others; they are especially vulnerable in this regard. For example, major life events, such as trauma or divorce, can be a triggering factor for substance use. Certain personality traits such as risk sensitivity, among others, are also a risk factor for (problematic) substance use.

By problematic use we mean both occasional risky use and chronic use. Occasional risky use is characterised by occasional use of a large quantity at the wrong place or time. This form of problematic use first and foremost creates a safety problem (risk of accidents, etc.) and can also lead to serious health damage (e.g. risk of overdose). Chronic use or long-term excessive use leads to serious physical, social and psychological damage and has effects in different areas such as family, health and work and leads to dependence.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol use is the third most important risk factor for disease and disability worldwide, after childhood underweight and unsafe sex (for comparison, tobacco use ranks sixth). The impact of alcohol use on disease and injury depends on social (developmental level, culture, drinking context, etc.) and individual vulnerability (age, gender, family factors and socio-demographic characteristics). In addition to its addictive effects, it is causally linked to a lot of serious health conditions, such as heart disease and liver disease. Alcohol consumption also increases the likelihood of crossing sexual boundaries. This includes both the likelihood that a person will cross another's boundaries and the likelihood of becoming a victim of sexually transgressive behaviour.

CANNABIS

From the VUB, we are committed to educating about risks related to cannabis use. The effects of cannabis can vary enormously depending on the variety, quantity and method of use. There are various types of cannabis and the amount of THC (the most active substance in cannabis) can vary greatly depending on whether it is grown in Belgium or the Netherlands or imported from other countries. The higher the THC content, the faster and stronger you get under the influence. Inexperienced people can unintentionally overuse cannabis with a high THC concentration and get into trouble.

Cannabis intensifies the mood of the moment; if you already feel bad, this feeling gets worse. Besides concentration disorders, use can also induce negative feelings. Anxiety, panic or confusion are some of them. But use can also lead to acute psychotic symptoms. The number of patients with a cannabis-related disorder as a main diagnosis in medical-psychiatric admissions in Belgium more than quadrupled between 1999 and 2017. Regular use increases the risk of lung disease or heart problems.

ILLEGAL DRUGS

When talking about illegal drugs in the VUB resources policy, we refer to XTC and amphetamines, cocaine, hallucinogenic drugs, the new psychoactive substances (including GHB, ketamine and 2-CB) and opioids (such as nitrous oxide). These drugs are used because of their stimulant or hallucinogenic

action, its analgesic or sleep-inducing properties, to r e m o v e inhibitions, and so on. The final effects and potential harm depend on many factors such as:

- the environment in which the drugs are taken (a familiar and safe environment versus a stimulating environment)
- personal characteristics including personal sensitivity or weight.

Adverse effects may result from:

- one-off drug use such as an overdose or injury due to intoxication
- chronic use that may involve:
 - a diagnosis of dependency or addiction
 - health problems
 - social, legal, financial or emotional problems.

There are a number of factors that can significantly increase risk:

- Most drugs are produced and traded illegally. Substances are often added to illegal drugs that are dangerous to health. Despite the existence of testing facilities, testing for the quality of purchased illegal drugs in Belgium happens minimally.
- The strength of illicit drugs can vary, often causing users - unknowingly - to take too much.
- Combination use - for example, using uppers (stimulants) and downers (narcotics) drugs interchangeably - is dangerous. The result of such drug mix is unpredictable, can lead to unpleasant surprises such as an overdose and takes extra demands on the body. This often leads to serious health problems.

SEDATIVE OR STIMULANT MEDICATION

Sleep and sedatives are used to treat sleep problems, sleep disorders and anxiety disorders, or epilepsy and severe agitation. Their dampening effect on the central nervous system reduces brain activity. This causes a calming and muscle relaxing effect. Benzodiazepines (Xanax, Valium) are the most commonly used. With a high risk of dependence and tolerance, some caution is therefore required when these drugs are prescribed by a doctor.

A false assumption is that stimulant medications, such as Rilatine, work miracles. They are useful drugs after a diagnosis of AD(H)D, provided they are used properly. Medical review is important when they are used. However, stimulant medications like Rilatine are also taken by students without ADHD. They hope to increase their study performance through taking this medication. When taking Rilatine non-medically, students without ADHD experience more of the effects of this amphetamine: they experience a sharp, alert and energetic feeling. Vigilance is needed because of risks of overdose, hallucinations and developing addiction.

5.1.2. Correcting wrong norm perceptions

In our society, alcohol seems to be a part of everything. And this perception certainly prevails as far as student culture is concerned; studying and alcohol consumption seem inextricably linked. Yet the stereotypical image of students drinking a lot of alcohol is not true. Students drink less than they think of themselves, with rather moderate drinkers being the norm. Ditto for the use of psychoactive medication. The majority of students observe the use of psychoactive medication during exams to improve performance. But the results of the VAD student survey claim otherwise.

These are examples of wrong and dangerous perceptions that need to be corrected. Because students might consider those perceptions the norm in order to belong. Through short, clear communication campaigns, we aim to correct these misconceptions. To this end, we will, among other things, reuse existing campaign material developed by De Druglijn: 'Being a student = more than boozing' or 'Studying and medication do not go hand in hand'. These campaigns should counter the stereotypical misconceptions, and additional peer pressure that students experience as a result.

In addition, through campaigns, we want to encourage our students to continue to take a critical look at the role and place of alcohol, drugs and other substances in student life.

Finally, based on our own data, we will communicate prevalence figures to VUB GPs. This will allow them to inform students during consultations that the majority of students drink less, and that the majority do not use psychoactive medication to study successfully.

5.1.3. Developing risk mitigation knowledge and skills

Drinking alcohol, taking stimulant medication without medical review, ... is never without risks. However, guidelines can provide guidance that allows users to reduce the risks to their health. For example, the VAD guideline already helps determine when and how many glasses of alcohol one should ideally drink. There is also the health advice to drink enough water. We combine such guidelines and health messages with additional prevention messages that draw students' attention to the alcohol and drug issues in nightlife. Concise messages or a punchy slogan encourage visitors to seek information and mark the start of a behavioural change process. Consider the campaign 'Never waste a great party'. With messages such as 'Leave the mixing to the DJ' or 'Out together, home together', concrete tips are given to nightlife enthusiasts.

By teaching students risk-reducing knowledge and skills on alcohol, drugs and substance use, we aim to encourage them to make healthy choices and also take care of the environment. We will provide students with risk-reducing drinking tips using an infographic and overarching awareness campaign. Here are some examples:

- Keep an eye on your glass. Mark your glass and avoid accidental swaps with friends.
- Decide in advance how long and how much you will drink
- Avoid hangovers. Alternate alcoholic with non-alcoholic drinks.
- Pour the correct amount of alcohol when drinking in private. An appropriate glass helps with this.
- Watch yourself for signs such as dizziness, feeling out of control of yourself or otherwise feeling that you have had enough. If so, it is time to switch to non-alcoholic drinks.
- Eat enough before starting alcohol. With a full stomach, you are less likely to get drunk.
- Keep it cosy. Take care of each other and respect everyone's boundaries.

Prevention messages are most effective when supported by environmental interventions that encourage visitors to act on them. Consider, for example, sensitisation around health risks such as dehydration or overheating. It is important to follow up on prevention messages by, for example, offering sufficient free water in visible and accessible places, or providing an inviting non-alcoholic offer that is more competitively priced compared to alcoholic drinks.

5.1.4. Developing personal and social skills

Besides risk-reduction knowledge and skills, we also sensitise students around how to consciously deal with stress, social pressure, ... Studies show that people drink or use substances to cope with various forms of stress, especially when social support or guidance is lacking. Smoking a glass of alcohol or cannabis to unwind may seem like a good idea, but this should definitely not become a habit because of the risk of addiction (physical and/or mental dependence). By teaching students healthy coping strategies, we want to help them not to immediately resort to substance use when they experience stress. The support offer from the student counselling service is very relevant here. The student psychologists have various tips & tricks to help students get started or support themselves in coping with stress, fear of failure, ... They also provide interactive group sessions.

5.1.5. Early intervention for students at increased risk of a substance problem

The VUB community must be alert in recognising signs in and dealing with students with (an increased risk) of substance use. Being able to recognise signals (conspicuous absence, decreased concentration, lower productivity, student seeks help for depression, anxiety or sleep disorders, ...) is of paramount importance to intervene early and prevent substance use from escalating.

As mentioned above, substance experimentation does become somewhat more common in the college years. But when does experimentation become a problem? If a student drinks alcohol or uses certain drugs, that does not make them an addict. Not every use of cannabis, for example, leads to reduced performance at university. But conversely, a user does not have to be an addict to have an alcohol or drug problem either. A student who uses too much once can already be at great risk. Or experimenting can also cause problems. Binge drinking is one such example resulting in physical (black outs, alcohol poisoning), psychological (impulsive behaviour, impaired control) and social risks (aggression, risk of accidents).

We will define the VUB actors who would benefit from a gatekeeper training organised by Study Guidance. Among other things, actors will learn in this training to recognise signs in students at risk of a substance problem.

First-line workers, such as student psychologists and general practitioners affiliated with the VUB, can use the Me-Assist tool in case of suspected risky substance use in contact with the student. This tool helps the counsellor to enter into a conversation with the student about alcohol, drugs or psychoactive medication, to detect substance use and estimate its severity.

A student can use a series of self- and knowledge tests, via The DrugLine, to find out to what extent one actually knows a drug. The self-tests give an estimate of how risky a person's use is. We publish information on this series of self-tests and knowledge tests on the student portal.

5.2 DISCUSSING SUBSTANCE USE AMONG VUB STUDENTS

There are several reasons why students start or continue with drugs, alcohol or psychoactive medication. The most common cause is the well-known 'social pressure'. This mechanism can cause students to give in and drink or use (too much) anyway.

Student life should remain enjoyable for everyone. To succeed in that, every student should deal responsibly with substance use and say "no" in time. To this end, it can be helpful that (problematic) substance use is discussable among students. But starting a conversation about problematic substance use is not a matter of course. We aim to change the social norms around alcohol use and want to remove the taboo on using drugs and

break through psychoactive medication so that students can easily discuss this, but also dare to approach confidants or care actors. By extension, guidance that responds to this should be accessible and readily available.

To facilitate this culture of conversation, we will:

- Providing students with 'talking tips' to start a conversation on this topic.
- Offer student associations tools to raise and discuss substance use within an association.

Through building a culture of conversation built on sufficient reliable information, available support and ready-to-use tools, we hope to achieve the following results:

- The empowerment of our students has been increased. This will allow them to make informed and sustainable choices.
- Social control over the use of alcohol, drugs and psychoactive medication will increase.
- The VUB's vision on the use of alcohol, drugs and psychoactive substances within its university community continues to be actively promoted. In this way, support for the VUB's substances policy is systematically increased.

6. CONTEXT-ORIENTED WORK: HOUSING, NIGHTLIFE AND CAMPUS

Context-oriented measures are also needed. Because of the specificities of higher education contexts, cross-institutional rules and procedures will be less effective. After all, the focus of substance use by students is mainly in certain contexts. The 'alcohol and drugs' working group distinguished three contexts of use for which we will work out environment-specific interventions: housing, nightlife and the campus.

The following definitions regarding different behaviours related to substance use are relevant when reading this chapter:

- Possession: To possess a resource while in the VUB context (VUB Main Campus and Health Campus).
- Use: Using a resource in VUB context
- Being under the influence: Impaired functioning. The person exhibits behaviour that deviates from normal functioning. *Some signs of 'being under the influence': breath of drink, smell of cannabis, impaired functioning, loss of control, ...*
- Incentive: Urging someone to actually try the drug
- Dealing: providing drug(s) (whether or not) for profit

6.1 HOMEOWN

Studying and going to digs - for many, it is inseparable from student life. As a dorm student, freedom beckons: dorm students, even more than commuter students, have the opportunity to fill in the days themselves and experience student life to the full.

Alcohol and drug use in dorms indirectly affects dorm mates when a fellow dorm mate is under the influence too often. Besides causing concern, this also creates an unsafe environment for dorm mates. Indeed, the use of drugs, alcohol or psychoactive medication in digs can create problem scenarios within the cohabitation of dormitory students:

- By their use show students inappropriate party behaviour - e.g. disproportionate noise - with which they do not respect the peace of fellow residents.
- Norms and boundaries blur among students under the influence of substances.
- Transgressive behaviour can occur: a student knocks on the wrong door, crawls into someone's bed unwanted, stands drunk at a student's door, ...

Rules around what can and cannot be done regarding substance use will therefore prove all the more useful. They promote living together, prevent nuisance and offer a big stick for when things go wrong. For the VUB student rooms, these rules can have their place in the VUB Household regulations for student houses. These regulations are expected to be observed by the residents of the VUB rooms in function of facilitating living together as smoothly as possible.

We also identify the need for a clear procedure for supporting students in whom impaired functioning or problematic use is noted at kot.

6.1.1 Commit to a protective environment

- ACTORS: KOT COACH, CAMPUS MONITORING AND JANITORIAL STAFF

Dorm students may face problem situations such as nuisance, transgressive behaviour, unsafe situations... as a result of dorm mates under the influence of alcohol, drugs or psychoactive medication. Sometimes individual responsibilities of those created problem situations get lost in the anonymity of a group. But the problem situations create frequent frustrations among the cot residents. Confrontation is not always obvious. The student can always contact the **Kotcoach**. In the first place, the Kotcoach offers a listening ear to the students. He then mediates in working towards a solution: he brings the parties around the table and supports the students involved in finding a solution tailored to the group. If necessary, for example in the case of repeated reports of problematic use by a kot student (see 'Act when kot students suspect problematic use'), the kot coach will refer the student about whom there are concerns.

The **VUB campus surveillance is responsible for** safety on campus. Dorm students can contact the security guards to report nuisances on the VUB dorms: strange people, dorm parties getting out of hand, the presence of drugs, and so on. Security can observe these nuisances, report them (who is involved - who has caused the nuisance and who is causing the nuisance) and mediate (indicate to nuisance-creating cot students that they are not doing well and, for example, ask them to stop the party).

For any safety incident, security is the first point of contact. If dorm students report a safety incident, security guards provide a listening ear and first aid (calming down, administering first aid, etc.) for the dorm students involved. A priority check is then done. If it is an incident or more serious (e.g. amok/blind violence, suspicious package), the guards always contact their chain of command. The latter makes an assessment of the seriousness of the situation. Both in situations of nuisance and security incidents, surveillance cannot intervene 'manu militari'. In actions that require police involvement, such as drug dealing, security will always contact the hierarchical line. It is the chain of command that can order follow-up steps to be taken.

Regarding the 'aftercare' phase and possible referral in case of students with psychosocial distress by guarding, the procedure 'Reception by guarding' should be further finalised.

Concierges, in turn, keep a watchful eye and try not to escalate conflicts that build up slowly.

- THE GUIDELINE: STUDENT HOUSE RULES

The rent contract, concluded between VUB and student, is supplemented by internal regulations. These regulations contain a number of rules of thumb and agreements to ensure a smooth coexistence between students. The tenant is expected to take note of these regulations before concluding the tenancy agreement and declares to behave according to its provisions. The VUB household regulations amended in 2022 leave no doubt around the use and possession of various substances (illegal drugs); this is prohibited. Any drug-related nuisance may have direct consequences for the tenancy agreement. The severity of the offence will be taken into account to impose an appropriate measure (see sanctions policy).

To regularly bring the rules of thumb of the regulations to the attention of dormitory students, we will develop positive, constructive communication campaigns in this regard. With such campaigns, we want to sensitise and inform students about what is and what is not allowed.

- PROTOCOL WHEN PROBLEMATIC USE IS SUSPECTED IN COED STUDENTS

Problematic substance use among kot students can come to light in different ways:

- by an accident in a dormitory due to intoxication
- due to impaired functioning in a cot student. This manifests itself in inappropriate and uninhibited behaviour, repeated absences, mood swings, ...
- by a fellow dorm-mate, concierge, security guard, a staff member of the student housing service, ... who recognises certain signs (e.g. a student seeking help for depression, anxiety, sleep disorders or other psychological complaints).

We are developing a procedure for supporting students in whom problematic use is noticed within VUB housing. That procedure, visualised in a flow chart, will include the following elements:

- When impaired functioning is noticed in a dormitory student, we recommend that the assessor tries to have an exploratory conversation with the student. In this conversation, the assessor expresses concerns about behaviour, functioning, etc. and suggests where the student can go for help.
- In case of repeated concerns already expressed towards the student, they inform the kot coach. The latter engages in conversation with the student. If a need for help is suspected, the kotcoach will warmly refer the student to the support offered by the VUB and the various welfare partners (including the CGG and De Druglijn).
- When noticing a serious form of impaired functioning and suspicion of problematic use, the fixer, e.g. head of student housing or the caretaker, is expected to report this to the kotcoach. In the conversation with the student, the latter will express concern about the behaviour and functioning and point out to the student how serious it is. Students with acute psychosocial distress are referred to internal and external services for care and support. If the student is not acutely at risk, referrals may also be made to VUB's care and support services. It is the student's choice whether to respond to this.

- SANCTIONS POLICY

The Student Housing Service has developed a clear sanctions policy that takes into account the severity of the offence to impose an appropriate measure. When it is an unconscious violation of the house regulations, students will be urged to adjust their behaviour before a warning or further sanctions are given. When a one-off nuisance is observed by a student, they will receive a warning. The superlative concerns a warning and this, for example, when nuisance persists after previous warnings. Consider, for example, the repeated organisation of kot parties with the necessary noise nuisance.

As contained in the Student Household Regulations, all drug-related nuisances can have direct consequences for the tenancy agreement. A distinction is made between mild drug-related nuisances (noise nuisance, odour nuisance, traces of drugs in the communal area, non-violent conflict) and severe drug-related nuisances (drug use, drug-related violence, unlivable social society, contact with court):

- When a finding of mild drug-related nuisance is made, an official warning will follow. If the situation repeats itself, a sanction will follow.
- In case of serious drug-related nuisance (drug use, drug-related violence, unlivable social society, contact with court), a sanction will immediately follow. This can range from direct fine and a conditional sanction of 'last chance', to direct consequences for the rental agreement (e.g. no renewal for the next academic year) or immediate termination of the rental contract.
- When illegal practices are involved (excessive use of illegal drugs, dealing of illegal substances, assault, large-scale drug possession), further investigation is necessary. The local police will be informed of a 'suspicious drug situation' and an internal disciplinary procedure will be initiated at the same time. This disciplinary procedure will be coordinated with any judicial investigation. The Vice-Rectorate for Student Affairs will also be informed. We incorporate the procedure relating to the identification of illegal practices into an action protocol.

6.2 OUTPUT

We get signals that in nightlife at the Free University of Brussels, illegal substances are openly used, even tolerated. For students, especially generational students, such a climate may just encourage the use of. Because if drug use is accepted and/or alcohol use is taken for granted, this will have an impact on how students perceive their use. In addition, new students look for connection to a new group of friends, a student union, a sports club ... To belong to a new group, new students conform to the prevailing norms in that group.

Uncontrolled and problematic substance use in a nightlife context poses serious short- and long-term health risks to the users themselves. Intake of excessive amounts of alcohol, drugs or medicines can also lead to overdose during the nightlife itself, with life-threatening consequences. But use not only compromises the users' own health or safety but also the well-being and safety of others present there:

- The safety of student event organisers.
- security and volunteers (e.g. stewards). They regularly face aggression and intimidation. They also do not always have the knowledge and tools to deal specifically with alcohol and drug use that causes nuisance, including vandalism or dealing.
- visitors regularly experience feeling unsafe in an entertainment context where drugs and alcohol are strongly present. Booze and drugs make young people very vulnerable to unwanted

sexually transgressive behaviour; its use increases the likelihood of incidents of sexually transgressive behaviour. In a third of the situations in which young people were victims of unwanted sexually transgressive behaviour, the victim and/or perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Or were victims of spiking, where alcohol or drugs were secretly administered without their knowledge or consent. Users, in turn, put themselves in unsafe situations when they engage in uncontrolled substance use.

6.2.1 Striving for a safe nightlife environment and responsible substance use

With the ambitions defined below, we aim to create a safe nightlife environment for our students.

- KEY ACTORS: ORGANISERS, CAMPUS SECURITY, SECURITY STEWARDS AND EXTERNAL SURVEILLANCE

Organisers of VUB events have a responsibility towards visitors of nightlife events, especially regarding their well-being and safety. Today, we already use the following instruments to achieve a safe and healthy nightlife climate:

- For the safety of the participants, a safety plan with ground plan must be submitted for the tent TDs. The organiser should record this safety plan in a script where all technical requirements and safety regulations can be found.
- Events taking place in the BSG and BOJ halls must comply with the safety provisions of the respective hall regulations.
- Organisers of events on our campuses can call in VUB campus security if desired or needed. After all, the campus security is the first point of contact for all serious problems on the campuses, such as nuisance and the presence of undesirable persons. If drug dealing is detected, campus security has the explicit mandate to contact the police (see further 'Ban on dealing').
- Depending on the event location, the use of external surveillance is mandatory. When organising an event in the Q. Tent, the use of external security or volunteer guards is mandatory. These security officers are responsible for solving or preventing security problems (e.g. supervision of access control, compliance with visitor regulations, etc.), are a point of contact for students who feel unwell, and play an important role when serious incidents occur (spiking, etc.) or when evacuation of the entertainment venue is initiated. The clubs can also employ their own safety stewards, so-called 'atmosphere managers', who are clearly recognisable. These stewards are responsible for the 'atmosphere' and therefore also for safety (first aid, checking emergency exits, etc.). They try to prevent problems and mediate in case of impending conflicts. They play an important preventive role. From their 'service-oriented function', they can provide information to visitors, try to contain aggression, ensure safety and report problems to those responsible.

We would like to add the following to this list of enabling tools:

- We compile a list of reliable external security firms with quality work. We recommend that associations use a partner from this list when organising their student events.
- For an event to run safely, it is important that tasks and responsibilities are clearly divided among staff and that good internal agreements are made. A clear job description appoints limits and ensures that respective organisers, bar staff and volunteers are decisive

know how to act on violations (see 'Prohibition of dealing') or irresponsible substance use. On this basis, we make cooperation agreements with campus security and the police.

- ACCESS CONTROL AND NEW VISITOR REGULATIONS

In the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024, a system of access control of the VUB party facilities will come into effect with the following objective: to create a 'safe party zone'. Visitors who have committed an offence against the visitors' regulations may be sanctioned, including by being temporarily banned from entering the following party facilities at the VUB: the BSG hall, BOJ hall, marquee, Tempus, Lounge Bar 1050 and 1090 and Poincafé.

The basis of this access control system will be a visitor regulation applicable to all VUB locations for student events. Depending on the nature of the offence, these regulations will include an overview of the access bans that can be imposed. The regulations will contain clear provisions around the prohibition of possession and use of illegal drugs within the event locations. If violations are found upon inspection by the relevant government authorities, the user will be held responsible and liable for payment of any fines. Visitors will also be denied access to the event venue if they are intoxicated or behave aggressively upon arrival.

We are exploring the possibility of installing additional camera surveillance at the tent area and the BGS hall, in addition to the existing cameras managed by campus surveillance. Suppose a student wants to lodge a complaint in the context of an incident, for example, surveillance can make these images available - if requested by the police.

- CREATING A HEALTHY AND SAFE ENTERTAINMENT VENUE

Event organisers should inform visitors during but also before an event about house rules: what will and will not be tolerated during the event. Clear and timely communication is necessary, also regarding risk-reducing messages and the usual safety procedure (number of visitors allowed, promotion of safe traffic, the presence of a cool down zone, ...). For this, we can draw on the brochure 'Safe partying, tips for organisers', created by the VAD. By timely communication, we mean communicating risk-reducing messages prior to the event. Event organisers can draw attention to alcohol and drug issues on their own website, event page, or promotional posters. In parallel, alcohol and drug prevention initiatives can be organised, including a discussion evening. During the event, prevention messages should reach revellers. This can be done through an attractive stand, prevention messages in the cool down zone, or through projections clearly visible to the visitor.

We are also aiming to set up a cool down zone where visitors can go when they feel too much, to calm down, when they need medical care, etc. A first aid officer, a confidential person from the organisation and/or a security steward(s) will be present here.

Finally, we are looking with the associations at how to appoint a person responsible for prevention and safety during events. This person will oversee compliance with

the house rules, liaises with and briefs internal and external surveillance and creates awareness regarding safety regulations.

- TRAINING AND SUPPORT

Student associations, bar staff, event volunteers, ... regularly come into contact with students under the influence, with visitors displaying aggressive behaviour, or with other conflicts in nightlife. They often feel the need for additional support and training. Through train-the-trainer training, key people within an association receive broad training and in turn train other members of the organisation so that the information reaches as many people as possible. These trainings would address the following content:

- product information
- cross-border behaviour
- Conflict management: How can they de-escalate aggression and whose help can they seek for what (such as campus security and police).
- how to make visitors drink 'smart' and serve responsibly: how to deal with drunken customers, how to intervene preventively, learning to recognise the types of drinking motives and the different stages of alcohol intoxication.

In addition to the training sessions, we want to use low-threshold tools such as infographics around "what if someone becomes unconscious" and "what message do you give to a student who gets angry because he is running out of booze?" to provide additional assistance to student unions, reaching out to the wider student community.

- PROMOTION AND PRICE SETTING

We aim to implement a responsible pricing policy at TDs and evening activities organised by students. Student associations often provide a wide range of alcoholic drinks at TDs or other activities at very competitive prices compared to non-alcoholic alternatives (including non-alcoholic beers or mocktails). They adopt such pricing policies for economic reasons. In this context, we want to investigate how student associations can operate a profit model with beverage sales, offering various tasty and attractive non-alcoholic alternatives (cheaper) compared to the alcoholic beverages on offer. This research will be the subject of a master's thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Solvay Business School.

Additionally, we are exploring potential collaborations with suppliers and breweries to offer democratic pricing of low-alcohol/free alternatives, just as we are looking at offering kegs of alcohol-free beer.

Linked to this is the promotion of low-alcohol events in October and February. The start of the academic year and of the second semester, where study pressure is often slightly lower, are times when students experiment more, but where more incidents linked to alcohol intake are also observed.

Quite a few student event organisers, the volunteers behind the tap, also give away alcoholic drinks (for free) to visitors during the course of their event. We are discussing with BSGgtgv and the associations how this practice can be phased out.

- QUALITY NIGHTS LABEL

Quality Nights, the health charter, encourages clubs/nightlife venues to promote healthy and safe nightlife. Working with various partners, such as the VAD and the local prevention partner, this initiative aims to reduce health risks among nightlife revellers. Nightlife venues must implement a minimum of six 'services' to achieve the Quality Nights label:

- staff is made more skilled in dealing with aggression and health issues
- Partygoers get information on going out safely
- condoms are sold or provided free of charge
- free water is provided
- the noise level should be limited to the legal maximum
- earplugs are available free of charge
- initiatives are being taken to promote safe traffic.

We are exploring the feasibility of the Quality Nights label for VUB party venues, in collaboration with BSG as vzw and BOJ- raad vzw.

Also at other VUB events with amplified sound, such as the VUB Kick Off, we aim to provide certain 'services', such as free earplugs and water.

- HANDLING PROTOCOL FOR REPORTED SPIKING - PERPETRATOR AND VICTIM

In the past, there were a number of incidents of suspected spiking at our public student events. Spiking refers to the administration of narcotic or intoxicating substances without consent, such as by mixing in drinks. Common symptoms include speech difficulties, not feeling well, memory loss and loss of strength or inability to move certain muscles.

Our focus is on prevention and countering spiking, helping and discouraging perpetrators. We ask our VUB student associations to implement the following tips when organising events:

- Provide see-through glasses or cups so that the drinks are easily visible and visitors can recognise changes or change in consistency.
- Deploy extra students/volunteers so they can quickly remove the drinks left behind.
- Use the already available infographic that describes:
 - By which they can recognise if someone is spiked, or how to feel it themselves
 - What to do in the event of a self-observed or reported suspicion of spiking
- Systematically establishing a cool down zone where a victim is brought to safety and where they can count on understanding.
- Using *safe words* like "Ask for Angela" in promo.

From the VUB, we create clear flowchart indicating who potential victims of spiking or a bystander can contact, and what the follow-up steps are. In doing so, we will provide an overview of available medical and psychosocial assistance. The flow chart will also indicate what the follow-up steps are for perpetrators of spiking.

6.2.2 Banning dealing: handling protocol and student life codex

- BAN ON DEALING

Sale of cannabis and other illegal drugs at party and other venues will not be tolerated and will be severely punished. We incorporate the steps below into an action protocol:

- If a student, or visitor, ... is caught dealing drugs, the organiser is expected to report this to campus security who will report it to the police. The latter will be informed of a 'suspicious drug situation'.
- At the same time, the internal disciplinary procedure is activated. After all, drug dealing falls under 'disturbing good order', which triggers disciplinary action. This disciplinary procedure is aligned with any judicial investigation. With the initiation of disciplinary proceedings, the Vice-Rectorate for Student Affairs is also informed.

- CODEX STUDENT LIFE

The Student Life Codex creates a framework for the smooth running of student life at VUB. The BSGgtgv monitors the operation of the student associations and can give the student council reasoned advice to withdraw recognition, or withhold subsidies for a maximum of one year (Article 12 Student Life Codex). This includes when associations no longer meet the conditions for recognition, are in arrears with payments to the VUB or when they cause serious nuisance or commit offences. We intend to amend Article 12 §1 as 'serious nuisance or offences' is open to interpretation, especially regarding the use, possession and/or dealing of cannabis and other illegal drugs in association contexts :

Article 12 Losing recognition as a student association

§1 The BSGgtgv monitors the operation of student associations and may give reasoned advice to the Student Council to withdraw recognition, or withhold grants for up to one year:

- If a student union no longer complies with the provisions of the Student Life Code, and in particular
 - o No longer meets the values and code of conduct as stipulated in Article 2;
 - o No longer meets the conditions of approval as stipulated in Article 10;
 - o Breached its duties as stipulated in Article 14;For definitively recognised associations, a request for withdrawal of recognition follows two consecutive periods of failure to submit a report or three non-consecutive periods within a three-year period.
 - o Does not respect the regulations as stipulated in Article 19.
- *If a student union causes serious nuisance or commits (criminal)² offences. In case of criminal offences, the police will be notified and internal disciplinary proceedings will be initiated with the Vice-Rector for Education and Student Affairs.*
- If a student union has arrears to the VUB;
- If a student union is in arrears with payments to external firms that the VUB provides for address payment;
- If a student union is in arrears in renting the BSG and BOJ halls and other rooms provided to them or has misbehaved in that context.

§2 The Student Council makes the decision based on the seriousness of the facts. The Student Council may also impose specific remedial measures.

² Criminal offences include excessive use and/or possession of illegal substances, dealing in illegal substances, incitement to use illegal substances, assault, large-scale possession of drugs. This is a non-exhaustive list.

Recognised student associations must use the association premises as a good housekeeper (Art. 42 §4). Use, possession and/or dealing of cannabis and other illegal drugs is not consistent with 'using as a good family man'. We therefore intend to amend Article **42 §4** accordingly and add an additional paragraph (§5):

§4 Recognised student associations use the (shared) association premises assigned to them by the general manager as a good custodian. The associations respect the legal provisions in particular on the maximum possession of the premises. *In addition, the use, possession or sale of various substances such as illegal drugs is prohibited in the (shared) association premises. If infringements are established, the rights of use of the (shared) association premises may be revoked immediately by the general manager.*

§5 Recognised student associations sharing the same room are jointly responsible for arranging its use, clean-up and maintenance. They are jointly responsible for compensation for any damage or necessary maintenance.

Article 45 concerns the organisation of the lotting convention around the use of the BSG hall and tent. We intend to add an extra paragraph (§3) on establishing serious nuisance or (criminal) offences by a student association:

Article 45 Draw and coordination

§ 1 The BSGgtgv organises a drawing of lots regarding the use of the BSG hall and marquee twice a year. The first draw takes place in the last week before the start of the academic year. The second draw takes place in the last week before the winter break.

The BSGgtgv coordinates requests for use of VUB classrooms on the Main Campus.

§ 2 The BOJ Council asbl coordinates applications for use of the BOJ Hall.

§3 In case of serious nuisance or (criminal) offences, a student association can be excluded from the draw conventions organised by the BSGgtgv and BOJ-raad vzw by both the party venue operators and the VUB.

6.3 CAMPUS

The 'open campus concept' ensures that the VUB campuses are connected to the city. Visitors can use the outdoor infrastructure or VUB-specific visitor services such as the sports, culture, hospitality, or library infrastructure. The campuses are regularly visited by externals. Young families who stay on our green campus, ULB students who also use our picnic facilities, walkers from the neighbourhood, ... Alumni, students from other higher education institutions or other outsiders are often present at the VUB party locations. And this should of course be allowed as long as material is treated with respect and towards students, academic and VUB staff. The new visitor regulations for the VUB event location, and the VUB policy on substance use will therefore also apply to external visitors.

We note that students' feelings of insecurity increase as the evening progresses, partly due to drinking in, drinking games and binge drinking, drug use in certain places on campus or because of the behaviour of students under the influence. Use of drink, drugs or psychoactive medication, as cited earlier, can have an amplifying effect on transgressive behaviour or aggressive behaviour. We define the need for certain

environmental interventions such as structural adaptations, including better lighting and extra camera surveillance, which enhance the sense of security on the VUB campuses

6.3.1 ENVIRONMENTAL INTERVENTIONS

Environmental interventions organise the physical and social environment of students in some way within the educational institution and in the environment of the educational institution (by this we mean e.g. concessionaires such as Complex). Interventions in the physical and psychological environment can play a supporting role in rolling out and realising the ambitions of this policy plan. In what follows, we provide a detailed overview of environment interventions to be pursued:

- Adaptations to campus infrastructure can be helpful in preventing transgressive behaviour.
- Building a protective and safe environment can help identify what students are struggling with more quickly.
- Environmental interventions can reinforce an awareness campaign, making it more impactful. Examples include the Tournée Minerale campaign and the systematic offering of non-alcoholic alternatives at VUB activities.

- ALTERNATIVE OFFER: SYSTEMATICALLY OFFERING VARIOUS NON-ALCOHOLIC VARIANTS AT VUB-ACTIVITIES

The VUB wants to turn the excessive use of alcohol into smart drinking. We want to promote smart drinking and focus on changing social norms and habits ('you can also have fun without looking too deeply into the glass'). We do this by:

- systematically offer (attractive!) non-alcoholic alternatives at all venues, activities and events. We want to extend this principle to all events organised by the VUB. We will consult the VUB party locations, BSGgtgv, concessionaires, catering VUB-resto and UZ Jette and MARCOM to systematically provide an attractive offer of non-alcoholic drinks. We aspire to expand the supply of water fountains on campus, and to do so in visible and well-distributed places. These environmental interventions reinforce the awareness campaign around the importance of drinking enough water.

- LIMITING AVAILABILITY - ALCOHOL

Limiting availability is one of the most effective measures to reduce alcohol consumption and related risks. When alcohol is served on campus or at off-campus activities, it should be done responsibly: so-called 'smart serving'. Bar staff and tappers are given tools to take up this responsibility. The focus here is on no longer serving alcohol to people who have obviously drunk too much. We organise such a 'responsible serving' training course for our student associations that organise at least 1 TD per academic year; attending such a training course will be a prerequisite for participation in the draw. We are exploring how to make this training also accessible to the concessionaires on our campuses. After all, they bear the same responsibility: serving alcohol wisely. Subsequently, self-service should be avoided at activities or initiatives organised on campus or by the university off campus (e.g. academic opening or the staff barbecue). We

explore the possibility of no longer offering alcohol in VUB restaurants in Jette and Etterbeek.

- THE INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICE IS BETTING ON THE "SAFETY" THEME

A student survey revealed that students feel unsafe on campus due to dealing and/or using drugs. The unsafe campus spots that invite dealing have already been identified. Additional lighting was provided at these spots, or other physical adjustments were implemented to increase safety (e.g. chestnut fences). Through these interventions, we aim to discourage dealing and secondary offences such as theft. Despite these initiatives, some additional structural adjustments are needed so that students feel safe walking alone to dormitories or to their bikes at night. The Infrastructure Department will draw up an inventory of structural safety measures (better lighting, cameras, etc.) that can be realised in the short term. In addition, the theme of "promoting safety" will be consistently included in this department's long-term plans.

- ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

On campus and on social media, we frequently observe a lot of visible promotion for alcohol : Duvel TD, Maes advertising at the sports complex, ... These and other campus activities are usually sponsored by the alcohol industry. Seeing alcohol advertising and images of alcohol consumption affects students' alcohol consumption. Scientific research shows that exposure to alcohol advertising influences increases in alcohol consumption and creates a more positive attitude towards consuming alcohol.

In Belgium, alcohol marketing is permitted and regulated by the Covenant on Advertising and Marketing of Alcoholic Beverages. The aim of this Covenant is to protect young people from alcohol abuse and avoid advertising that encourages irresponsible, excessive and illegal consumption. We are examining what measures we can take to minimise alcohol advertising on campus, on social media and in the immediate area. In any case, we will highlight non-alcoholic alternatives at all activities organised by the educational institute and concessionaires linked to the VUB, at which drinks are served.

Advertising of psychoactive medication is banned on campus.

- PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT - AWARENESS CAMPUS MONITORING

The VUB wants to be a protective environment for its students and is strongly committed to this. Campus security is the most important actor in terms of safety on campus. They patrol the campuses day and night, record reports of incidents, escort students or staff to public transport or digs if they feel unsafe, etc. It was found that 1 out of 4 VUB students is reluctant to contact the security guards in case of an incident, nuisance, etc. A large group of students also appears to be insufficiently familiar with the tasks of the campus security guards and/or does not know how to contact them in case of an emergency or an incident. By means of clear signposting on the VUB campuses, we want to highlight the essential role of VUB campus security.

- COOPERATION WITH THE EVA CELL AND THE CARE CENTRE AFTER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

As mentioned earlier, drinking and drug use can increase the likelihood of sexual transgressive behaviour occurring. We want to provide students with extensive information on care and guidance for victims of sexually transgressive behaviour. For these information sessions we cooperate with the EVA (Emergency Victim Assistance) cell and the Care Centre After Sexual Violence. The EVA cell wants to offer the person concerned shelter in optimal conditions of confidentiality, a listening ear and respect. Furthermore, they guarantee maximum availability in counselling and treatment of the victim. The Care Centres After Sexual Violence offer multidisciplinary care to victims of sexual violence and counselling to their support persons. All care is offered under one roof by a specially trained team.

- COOPERATION WITH EXTERNAL HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ON DISCIPLINARY MATTERS

The modus operandi of students is not limited to the alma mater. Students from other higher education institutions also participate in VUB activities. In the past, the VUB was confronted with various forms of nuisance in the entertainment context, caused by non-VUB students.

- Depending on the seriousness of the offence, a complaint is lodged with the police. They in turn are responsible for following up.
- The competent VUB staff determine at their discretion whether a report to the competent colleague educational institution is necessary. For example, when the seriousness of the committed offence allows this, in case of manifest repetition of the committed offence or if a tendency is noticed (e.g. repeated nuisance by the same student group).

7. Strengthening the low-threshold care and counselling offer

We notice a normalisation of substance use among students. Their limited experience of substance use, and its effects on their physical and psychological well-being, is a matter of serious concern to the VUB. Yet spontaneous reports related to substance use to confidants, kotcoach, student psychologists, ... remain absent. Students do not readily spontaneously admit to a problem in terms of problematic substance use. This may reflect a lack of problem understanding or because they are ashamed. We find that students are reluctant to seek help because they are afraid of being judged and/or condemned. But also because they fear repressive measures if they were to seek help. In addition, students are reluctant to seek help because they fear a lack of drug-related knowledge among (first aid) staff. It is crucial to roll out a diversified range of intervention strategies that meet students' needs. Due to the previously mentioned limited self-help behaviour of students, attention should be paid to the elaboration of a low-threshold and accessible care offer. There is no 'one size fits all' treatment for problematic substance use given its complex nature. There is a need for a differentiated care offer. This translates into different strategies, ranging from prevention and early intervention to care and cure.

We direct students to material they can work with themselves, through helplines or self-tests (with personalised feedback), such as The Drugline. Outside the professional counselling circuit, students can also find support from people in their immediate environment, such as family, friends, kotcoach, ... When we consider organised counselling, primary care is the first non-specialised step in counselling. They are closest to the students and may be the first to encounter the issues. Applied to the VUB-

context, this concerns confidential counsellors, employees of Study Guidance, general practitioners, ... From their front-line function, they are best placed to detect (problematic) substance use and, if necessary, to intervene.

7.1 RELEVANT ACTORS

Identifying, catching and counselling problematic substance use among students early is of paramount importance. Research shows that the earlier one intervenes in this process, the more favourable the results are. Teachers, VUB confidential counsellors, study route counsellors, the kotcoach, staff of the student-focused desks, security, and so on should be alert to signals of problematic use. First-line staff have an important task in screening and early intervention. Therefore, the VUB organises gatekeeper trainings, with the aim of teaching the VUB community skills to recognise signals of emotional problems in students, and motivate them to seek help (where necessary). Students who experience problems such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, ... as a result of substance use need a specialised outpatient or appropriate assistance offer, always tailored to the student.

- VUB: A COMMUNITY OF CARING

Earlier in this policy, mention was made of the VUB's commitment to an environment that supports health-promoting standards. Mental and physical well-being is everyone's business. To achieve health gains, it is essential that all relevant actors within the VUB work together at different levels to create a community of caring. The VUB is therefore building an integrated, diversified and easily accessible care offer, both preventive and curative. The Departments of Student Affairs and Student Guidance act as driving forces to realise this offer together with various services, students, programmes and professional care providers. In this context, it is necessary to train the relevant VUB staff members on the risks of substance use by students.

Following this, we will offer a comprehensive first aid course. After all, essential actors such as the campus security regularly have to deal with difficult situations in which young people are under the influence of drink or drugs. It is crucial that they, but also volunteers (party spokesmen or stewards in the cool-down zones) or the kotcoach learn to distinguish between different behaviours such as aggression or psychosis, or detect symptoms of spiking and be able to refer the victim to the appropriate counselling. The VUB staff involved should also be aware of the care and counselling offer when they come into contact with students in situations of concern.

The prevention chapter already mentioned the ambition to encourage students to take care of each other. We want to use awareness campaigns (preventive interventions) to inform students about the effects and risks of substance use. In this way, they can notice risky behaviour themselves, address their peers about it and take care of each other.

- TUTORING

As mentioned above, substance use is concentrated in certain contexts such as nightlife or student accommodation. It is precisely for this reason that the existing VUB counselling offer, as well as counselling in the nearby region and online offerings, must become more familiar to all students. The Studiebegeleiding contact point is a first point of contact. Every student is welcome there to discuss concerns. Through their campaigns, Study Guidance works to further highlight its open culture. After all, everyone - with any problem or concern - is welcome at Study Guidance and taken seriously. That premise

contributes to Study Guidance's ambition: to help students increase their chances of study success and student well-being.

Problematic use of alcohol, drugs or psychoactive medication can and may also come up during individual counselling from Student Psychologists. Student psychologists can use the me-ASSIST tool to discuss alcohol, other drugs or psychoactive medication with a student. This tool helps detect substance use and assess its severity. Based on this risk assessment, the student psychologists map out the further support path tailored to the student. To do so, they use the existing referral tree that lists the relevant partners, including intensive (CGG, BRUCC, CAW and private psychologist or therapist) and short-term (primary psychological care) support partners.

Quite a few students face fear of failure, study stress or brooding behaviour during exam periods. Some then resort to stimulant medication, such as Rilatine. With awareness campaigns, study counselling will emphasise the importance of good nutrition, sufficient sleep and exercise during block and exam periods as success ingredients for concentrated studying, rather than stimulant medication.

Finally, Study Guidance will supplement its existing range of infographics with more information on student substance use.

- GENERAL PRACTICE AND MENTAL HEALTH CENTRE

On the Brussels Main Campus, we have a University Group practice of general practitioners where our students can go for medical care. When a doctor deems it necessary, or in case of strong suspicion, they can also use the me-ASSIST tool to detect problematic substance use. Following this, the doctors at the University Group practice will investigate how they can monitor the detected alcohol, drug and psychoactive medication problems over a period of time using the current record system.

The Centre for Mental Health (CGG) has a range of therapeutic options, such as individual and family therapies as well as medical and psychiatric counselling for persons with problematic substance use. They also have an early intervention offer, mainly aimed at young first-time users. In this context, we are setting up a collaboration with the CGG of Brussels. Next academic year, the Centre will also provide training for general practitioners on care and referral of students struggling with problematic substance use. We will also create a formal collaboration between the CGG and the general practitioners of the VUB regarding guidance and supervision of students.

- CARE AND SUPPORT - OUTSIDE OFFICE HOURS

Students often spend evenings or weekends on campus in the context of leisure activities or nightlife. It was previously cited that the link in young people between going out and substance use has been repeatedly demonstrated. Consequences of irresponsible substance use including intoxication, anxiety disorders, blackouts, ... occur more often outside VUB office hours. Even outside these office hours, students should have access to accessible care and support services. Installing a culture in which students dare to talk openly to each other about the use of alcohol, drugs or psychoactive medication can help students to dare to confide in a fellow student at those moments.

In addition, we need to make it clear to students via a flow chart which appropriate help they can turn to for appropriate support in the evening, night or at weekends.

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